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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 002413

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL IS XF IT UN

SUBJECT: PERES-BERLUSCONI MEETING: A READ-OUT

CLASSIFIED BY: POL MC TOM COUNTRYMAN FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) POLOFF MET WITH THE SPOKESMAN OF THE EMBASSY OF ISRAEL IN ROME TO OBTAIN A READ-OUT OF THE MAY 10 ROME MEETING BETWEEN PERES AND BERLUSCONI. WE ALSO OBTAINED A READ-OUT OF THE SAME MEETING FROM THE MFA. BOTH READ-OUTS WERE CONSISTENT.

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THE QUARTET

¶2. (C) PERES STRESSED THE IMPORTANCE OF THE NEWLY FORMED QUARTET. HE UNDERLINED THAT THE "HARMONIZATION" BETWEEN THE FOUR, AND ESPECIALLY BETWEEN THE US AND THE EU, IS KEY TO SOLVING THE CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST. BERLUSCONI SAID HE UNDERSTOOD AND APPRECIATED PERES' MESSAGE ON THE NEED TO COORDINATE EVEN MORE CLOSELY WITH THE US, THAT HE HAS AN EXCELLENT RELATION WITH THE PRESIDENT, AND THAT HE PLANS TO RAISE THE MIDDLE EAST ISSUE WITH BUSH ON MAY 27 IN ITALY.

ISRAEL'S DEMANDS OF ARAFAT

¶3. (C) PERES STATED THAT THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT DEMANDS A 100% EFFORT FROM ARAFAT TO STOP THE VIOLENCE AND TERROR WITHOUT EXPECTING 100% RESULTS. IN ADDITION TO A CEASE-FIRE, THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IS ASKING ARAFAT TO CREATE A CENTRAL COMMAND OF ALL ARMED MILITIAS IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES SO THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD HAVE A SINGLE RATHER THAN MANY COUNTERPARTS.

A PEACE CONFERENCE

¶4. (C) ONLY AFTER ISRAEL'S ABOVE DEMANDS ARE MET, SAID PERES,
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WOULD A PEACE CONFERENCE BE USEFUL. THIS CONFERENCE, HE ADDED, OUGHT TO BE LED BY THE QUARTET TO ADDRESS LESS "THE MEANS TOWARDS PEACE" AND MORE THE "CHARACTER" OF PEACE. SOME ARAB STATES SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE CONFERENCE BUT NOT SYRIA, WHICH, ACCORDING TO PERES, IS NOT "READY" YET. ALL THE DIFFERENT PLANS OUGHT TO BE DISCUSSED: THE SAUDI PLAN, THE TENET/MITCHELL PLAN, AND THE PERES/ABU ALAA DOCUMENT. BERLUSCONI REPEATED HIS DESIRE TO HOST THE PEACE CONFERENCE IN ROME. PERES APPROVED OF ROME AS THE CONFERENCE LOCATION FOR ITS SUITABLE POLITICAL CLIMATE, ITS GEOGRAPHICAL PROXIMITY, AND ITS EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH BOTH SIDES. HE ADDED HOWEVER THAT THE FINAL DECISION OF LOCATION BELONGS TO THE US AND THAT THE GOI OUGHT TO DISCUSS IT DIRECTLY WITH THE USG IF IT WANTS TO HOST THE CONFERENCE IN ROME. BOTH PERES AND BERLUSCONI AGREED THAT THE CONFERENCE SHOULD TAKE PLACE WITHIN TWO MONTHS.

ISRAEL'S VIEW OF ITALY'S ROLE

¶5. (C) WHEN ASKED HOW THE GOI COULD HELP THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, PERES ANSWERED:
BY "HARMONIZING" THE EU/US EFFORTS, PURSUING AN ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PLAN FOR THE REGION, AND SUPPORTING THE IDEA OF A PEACE CONFERENCE BY THE END OF JUNE.

A LOOK TO THE FUTURE

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¶6. (C) PERES SAID THAT THE PALESTINIANS HAVE A PRESIDENT BUT NOT A LEADER IN ARAFAT. HE STRESSED THAT ISRAEL SUPPORTS UN RESOLUTIONS 242 AND 338 BUT THAT A RETURN TO THE PRE 1967 BORDERS WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION BECAUSE OF ISRAEL'S SECURITY.

SEMBLER

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